

THE THREE KINGDOMS (A.D. 221-265)

Following the collapse of the Later Han, for several decades the Empire was divided into three major fragments and the period, consequently, is known in Chinese records as that of the Three Kingdoms. In the Northeast, as we have seen, Ts'ao P'ei, the son of the distinguished and able but unscrupulous Ts'ao Ts'ao, persuaded the last of the Later Han to abdicate in his favor. Taking the name of the power which his famous father had exercised in fact, he called himself Emperor. His dynasty he denominated Wei. He had possession of the Han capital, but only a minority of the Han domains recognized him. In the South, Sun Ch'tian, son of an official and general of the declining years of the Later Han, declared himself Emperor and gave to his dynasty the name of Wu. He and his successors controlled most of the former possessions of the Han in the Yangtze Valley east of the gorges and on the south coast into what is now Annam. Wu established its capital first at what is now Wuchang and later at the present Nanking. In Szechwan a member of the Liu family, Liu Pei, by name, a descendant of one of the Han Emperors, assumed the imperial title, and his dynasty—usually regarded by orthodox Chinese historians as the legitimate one of the time—is called the Minor or Shu Han, Shu being the designation of the state over which he ruled.

The half-century or so during which these three states existed is one of the most romantic in the history of China. Around it stories of valor and adventure have collected which have been the source of many plays and popular narratives and of what is prob-

ably China's outstanding historical novel, the
San Kuo Chih Yen I, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms. The
most famous
heroes of the period are the trio, Liu Pei, Chang
Fei, and Kuan
Yii, and the premier of the Shu Han, Chu-ko
Liang. The first
three are said to have become sworn brothers by
the "Peach
Garden Oath" and are reputed to have performed
prodigious
deeds of heroism. Kuan Yii and Chang Fei perished
in 219 and
220 respectively, before the abdication of the last
of the Later
Han, the one by assassination and the other
executed by Sun
Ch'ian. Liu Pei died in 223. Centuries afterward,
Kuan Yii was
canonized as God of War and as such has been
widely wor-